FAMILIAR LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO THE
INHABITANTS OF BIRMINGHAM,
IN
REFUTATION OF SEVERAL CHARGES,
ADVANCED AGAINST
THE DISSENTERS,
BY THE REV. MR. MADAN, RECTOR OF ST. PHILIP'S,
IN
HIS SERMON,
ENTITLED,
'*The principal Claims of the Diſſenters conſidered.*'
Preached at St. Philip's Church, on Sunday, February 14, 1790.

PART I.

THE SECOND EDITION CORRECTED.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L.L.D. F.R.S.

> To ſpeak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, ſhewing all meekneſs unto all men. TITUS iii. 2.
>
> MR. MADAN'S TEXT.

> Ne ſævi Magne Sacerdos. VIRGIL.

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FAMILIAR LETTERS, &c.

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LETTER I.

Of the ſeditious Tendency aſcribed by Mr. Madan to the late Public Meetings of the Diſſenters.

My generous Townſmen and Neighbours,

HAVING lived very happily near ten years in this part of the country, and being deſirous to acquire, and preſerve, your good opinion, I take the liberty to addreſs you on a ſubject to which your attention has of late been very frequently called, viz. the application to parliament for the repeal of the *Teſt and Corporation Acts*, both from the pulpit and the preſs, eſpecially by the juſtly reſpected rector of St. Philip's, in his late *Sermon*, entitled, *The principal Claims of the Diſſenters conſidered*, in which he has advanced many things tending to give you a very unfavourable opinion of the Diſſenters in general, and, not very obliquely, of myſelf in particular.

Mr. Madan's excellent character will lead you to give him entire credit for whatever he ſhall think proper to declare, eſpecially from ſo ſacred a place as the *pulpit*. For you will naturally conclude, that ſpeaking with ſuch ſolemnity, he muſt have carefully conſidered what he aſſerted; and his ſincerity would not have been called in queſtion, even if he had not thought neceſſary to declare, p. 6, that what he delivered were the *ſettled principles and conviction of his heart, as he hoped for mercy from the God of truth*. This is ſuch a ſolemn form of an oath, or an appeal to God, for his ſincerity, as is not very common, and is never uſed except in caſes in which a man ſuppoſes that there may be ſome cauſe to ſuſpect his veracity; and how Mr. Madan ſhould conceive that this ſhould be *his* caſe I cannot imagine. Recourſe ſhould not be had to ſuch peculiarly ſolemn forms of aſſeveration without *neceſſity*, becauſe it tends to make them too common, by which means they come at length to loſe their effect.

Beſides, I cannot help wiſhing that the preacher had kept up to the ſpirit of his text a little better than he has done. This adviſes us to *ſpeak evil of no man*, *to be gentle*, and *to ſhew meekneſs towards all men*. But how is this conſiſtent with his imputing to a numerous ſect of his fellow citizens (with many of whom he muſt have had, I doubt not, a pleaſing and uſeful intercourſe) ſome of the very worſt and moſt dangerous deſigns, for which he can have no evidence beſides his own ſurmiſes. He calls the late proceedings of the Diſſenters to procure the repeal of the Teſt and Corporation Acts, p. 4, *clamorous* and *violent*. He intimates that our *final views* are of a *ſeditious tendency*. What favourable inference, ſays he, p. 27, "can be drawn from the alarm "which their leaders are ſounding through every part of "Great Britain about their *common cauſe*; how are we to "underſtand their voluntary contributions for national "meetings, and for *other public uſes*," directing your particular attention, as you ſee, to the laſt words, as being of a more ſuſpicious nature, by printing them in *italics*.

Certainly, my good friends, the preacher, in bringing theſe *railing accuſations*, has quite loſt ſight of his text—This is *ſpeaking evil*. It is not being very *gentle*, or *ſhewing much meekneſs*. But I account for it by his imagination being ſtrangely diſturbed with groundleſs terrors, on account of the intereſt that he and his friends have in the ſyſtem for which he is ſo very apprehenſive; ſo that he *fears where no fear is*, and where no other man, except one in a ſimilar ſituation, can ſee any cauſe of fear at all. But perceiving how much he is agitated on the ſubject, I ſhould not wonder if he ſuſpected an enemy to be concealed in every buſh, or to ſee him ſtart at his own ſhadow.

For do but conſider the thing coolly, and ſee what our proceedings have actually been. Have they not been the very ſame that, without any cenſure, have been again and again adopted by the moſt peaceable claſſes of people in the country, manufacturers for inſtance like yourſelves, who have no other wiſh than *quietly to follow their own buſineſs*, whenever they have imagined themſelves to be aggrieved by any particular law, or meaſure of government? Have they not held their *meetings* by public advertiſement? Have there not been ſeveral of them in this very town, many in London, and other places, to conſider of proper meaſures to obtain redreſs, to ſolicit parliament, &c. and when theſe meetings are, as indeed they neceſſarily muſt be, attended with *expence*, muſt not *funds* be eſtabliſhed to defray thoſe expences? Have not theſe things been done a thouſand times in this country without any body ever imagining that there was any thing *ſeditious*, or *hoſtile to government* in them? Now candour would ſuppoſe that we Diſſenters, like other bodies of men who have held ſimilar public meetings, have had no farther view than to relieve ourſelves from what we conſider as *hardſhips*.

By printing the words *other public uſes* in Italics, Mr. Madan certainly meant to inſinuate that, beſides what we *expreſs*, we had ſome farther *concealed* and *dangerous views*; as if there were not many *public uſes* of a very innocent nature, for which *money* was neceſſary, beſides merely defraying the expence of public meetings. You ſee that we print and publiſh many pamphlets, as well as inſert the reſolutions of our meetings in the public papers, in order to give our countrymen the information which we ſee they want concerning our ſituation, and the reaſons for our application to parliament. This buſineſs alſo requires a very extenſive *correſpondence*, which is neceſſarily attended with expence.

Now, might not, Mr. Madan's imagination, if it had not been of a very ſuſpicious turn indeed, have led him to ſuppoſe that by *other public uſes* were meant ſuch expences as *theſe*, and others equally neceſſary, but not deſerving to be particularly ſpecified in a printed reſolution? What a ſtrange ſuſpicious turn muſt that man's mind have, who could imagine that under ſuch an innocent expreſſion any *dark deſigns* were concealed; as if we were ready to take arms in order to overturn the government. He muſt be a mere Don Quixote who can believe any ſuch thing, and worſe than a Quixote who could inſinuate it without believing it. But as Mr. Madan ſolemnly declares that he ſpeaks from the *ſettled principles and conviction of his heart, as he hopes for mercy from the God of truth*, I am willing to think, that ſtrange as this notion is, and bordering even upon inſanity, it has actually got poſſeſſion of his mind. For can it be ſuppoſed that a miniſter of the goſpel of peace, in the perfect uſe of his reaſon, could, on ſuch a trifling ground as this, endeavour to raiſe your indignation againſt perſons with whom you have lived in good neighbourhood from your infancy, and whom you know to be as well affected to government, and as peaceably diſpoſed, as himſelf.

Whatever the Diſſenters be with reſpect to their *religious principles*, which concern only God and ourſelves, you ſee that we are not abſolutely *mad*: and that we muſt be to think of overturning a government ſo well eſtabliſhed as that of this country, even if we were not friends to it. But the Diſſenters have given clearer proofs of their value for it, and eſpecially of their attachment to the reigning family than the generality of the clergy, whoſe loyalty, though they now make ſo great a parade of it, is well known to be of very late date; whereas ours was always zealous and active from the firſt acceſſion of the preſent reigning family, as the moſt authentic documents teſtify.

As to our *public meetings*, which have given ſuch umbrage to Mr. Madan, have not the Quakers always been in the habit of doing the very thing that he conſiders as of ſo ſeditious a tendency in us. Have not they their *diſtrict meetings* every month, and their *national meetings* in London every year; and have they not a common *fund* to defray the expences attending them, and for *other purpoſes* alſo not particularly ſpecified? As to what we do in our *diſtrict* *meetings* (for as yet we have not held any national one) are not our reſolutions made public? You ſee them in all the newſpapers, ſo that you may read, and examine them yourſelves, and ſee whether they contain any thing of a ſeditious nature. It is for your information, and judgment of them, that we are at ſo much expence to make them public. Our wiſh is to give you information, to lay our caſe clearly before you, to invite the accuſations of our adverſaries, and to make you our judges.

Mr. Madan could not write as he has done, without ſuſpecting that, beſides our *printed reſolutions*, we have *others* which we do not publiſh, like the *ſecret articles* in public treaties between ſtates and ſovereigns. But ſo very heterogeneous a body as the Diſſenters are, agreeing in nothing but a deſire of *equal liberty*, could not well have, or keep, ſecrets. Mr. Madan himſelf ſays, p. 27, that "we betray "our final views indiſcreetly." And truly, if we were not honeſt men, we are very indiſcreet indeed. You never heard of rogues and traitors going to work as we do. If they did, they would have very little chance of ſucceeding in ſuch deſigns as Mr. Madan imputes to us.

You have been told in a variety of publications, that I have threatened to blow up the church, if not the ſtate alſo, with *gunpowder*, and Mr. Madan (who, if the church be blown up, muſt take his fate along with it) has inſinuated p. 26, that *I* in particular have dangerous views. Now, my good friends and neighbours, I am not actually a madman. You know too much of me to believe *this*. You ſee me walk about the ſtreets very compoſedly, without moleſting any body, and always behaving civilly to thoſe who behave civilly to me; and therefore I hope you will not think I have any ſuch diabolical intention. In fact, all the gunpowder that I manufacture is contained in ſuch pamphlets as this that you are now reading, and though it may ſerve for wadding for a gun, it can do nothing elſe towards ſhooting birds, or killing men. My gunpowder is nothing but *arguments*, which can have no force but what you yourſelves ſhall be pleaſed to give them, from your own conviction of the reaſonableneſs of what I lay before you.

Like other people, who think themſelves in the right, I wiſh, no doubt, to bring others to think as I do on all ſubjects of importance. But the pains I take in this way is for *your* own good, and not for *mine*; and though I ſhould be ever ſo much miſtaken, my intention is friendly, and no harm can ariſe from it. If the conduct of your clergy be juſtifiable, and even commendable, as I acknowledge it to be, in endeavouring to bring Diſſenters into the church, provided they make uſe of no other means than *arguments*, it cannot be wrong in me to endeavour by other arguments to bring you from it. We equally mean to conduct you to heaven in the way of truth, and the practice of virtue. After all, you hear us both, and judge for yourſelves; and we have no reaſon to expect that you will go one way or the other till you think you have good reaſon for ſo doing? What then is it that your clergy would frighten you with?

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

Proofs from Hiſtory and recent Facts, that neither the Diſſenters in general, nor the Preſbyterians in particular, have been ſuch Enemies to Monarchy as Mr. Madan has repreſented.

My good Friends and Neighbours,

MR. Madan is pleaſed to ſay, p. 13, "Is there no reaſon "to ſee with ſuſpicion their declarations of reverence "to the government, and of loyalty to the king, however "ſpeciouſly and pompouſly announced, when the amount "of that reverence has been exactly aſcertained by a woful "experience of republican tyranny, and the extent of that "loyalty has been exactly delineated with the blood of a "king."

In this extraordinary paragraph, in which (with what views are beſt known to himſelf) Mr. Madan confounds the caſe of the preſent king George III. with that of Charles I. as if they were kings of ſimilar characters, and governed by ſimilar maxims, ſo that whoever could take it into their heads to riſe againſt the one, and dethrone him, would do the ſame by the other if they could; he too plainly inſinuates that all Diſſenters (at leaſt ſuch as met at Leiceſter, whoſe reſolutions he quotes, and which are ſimilar to thoſe that have been adopted in all other meetings, ſo that, in fact, he muſt mean to comprehend the great body of them in his cenſure) are in their hearts haters of *kings in general*, and of the preſent king in particular, that they would certainly murder them all without diſtinction, if they had opportunity; and that all our declarations to the contrary are not to be regarded.

Now, not to ſay that our declarations of reverence for the preſent government, and of loyalty to the preſent king, are no more liable to ſuſpicion than his own declarations, that what he tells you to our prejudice (leading you to conſider us as a band of traitors and rebels) is from his *ſettled principles and the conviction of his heart, as he hopes for mercy from the God of truth*, (which mercy, if he ſincerely repent, I doubt not he will obtain) let us conſider what *reaſon* he can have for this injurious accuſation of us, as *king-haters*, and *king-murderers*. Let us ſee if we can trace where he got theſe *ſettled principles and convictions of his heart*, though I fear we ſhall not eaſily find it. It muſt be from ſome very obſcure quarter indeed, inacceſſible to all mankind, and of which I ſuſpect he will not be able to give any clear account himſelf. It is certain that the notions he has taken up concerning the death of Charles I. admitting that the preſent Diſſenters, at the diſtance of near a century and a half from the time of that tranſaction, were all the lineal deſcendants of thoſe who put him to death (inheriting their eſtates, names, and characters, and conſidering all kings, and the preſent king, in the ſame light as they did *him*) were not taken from any *hiſtory of England* that is now extant, at leaſt any that I have ever ſeen, or heard of. But when he is called upon, he will perhaps be pleaſed to produce it.

The hiſtory that I ſhould have thought to be moſt to his purpoſe is that of *Clarendon*, of what he calls *the grand rebellion*. But even there he will ſee that the parliament, which began the war with the king, was not a preſbyterian one. It was called, though reluctantly, by the king himſelf, and the members were choſen by the nation at large, and as freely as any members of parliament ever were; and if the neceſſary conſequence of that war was the death of the king, (ſince *cauſa cauſæ eſt cauſa cauſati*) they are *Epiſcopalians*, and not *Preſbyterians*, to whom the death of this *bleſſed martyr* may be ultimately aſcribed. But to *what* was he a martyr, but to his own tyranny and duplicity? He would have governed in an arbitrary manner, without any parliament, and actally raiſed taxes by his own authority; and for this it was that an epiſcopalian parliament (for the majority of the members were ſuch) declared war againſt him. And would not ſuch meaſures as theſe juſtify reſiſtance to *any* king? Is there nothing *ſacred* in the *rights of the* *people*; and are they to be wantonly trampled upon by any perſon, merely becauſe he is called *a king?* And if in ſuch a cauſe a king make war upon his ſubjects, and occaſion the death of thouſands of them, is his ſingle life of ſo much value, as that he ought to be ſpared for ſuch an enormity? But without conſidering the *juſtice* of this meaſure, let us ſee in what manner this tragical event came to paſs, and we ſhall find that, according to all hiſtorians, it is not to be attributed to the *Preſbyterians*, who were by far the majority of thoſe who diſſented from the church of England at that time.

It is ſomewhat remarkable that the parliament which took up arms againſt Charles I. though orignally Epiſcopalians, became in general Preſbyterians. But this muſt have been the effect of their own *conviction*, and not of any *compulſion*. Preſbyterians, however, as they were, it is well known that the members of this parliament continued to the laſt well wiſhers to the king, and he was not put to death till by an armed force they were overpowered. This armed force was headed by Independents, and againſt the wiſhes and earneſt remonſtrances of the Preſbyterians, now upon record, they beheaded the king. After that event, the Preſbyterians were the moſt active in bringing in his ſucceſſor Charles II. and without their concurrence he could not have been brought in at all.

Though the *Independents* who killed the king, might be called *Diſſenters* as well as the *Preſbyterians*, who remonſtrated againſt that meaſure, they were but a ſmall minority of them; and therefore, on the ſuppoſition that the preſent race of Diſſenters are deſcended alike from *both*, and we were reſponſible for the conduct of our anceſtors, it ought not to be imputed to us as *a body*, but only to a ſmall *part* of us. Beſides, the Independents of that day did not behead the king from any principles peculiar to their *religious perſuaſion*. Cromwell, and the reſt who joined him in that action, would have cut off the king, whatever had been *their* religion, or *his*. They conſulted not their *religion*, but their *ſafety*, and their *ambition*. And in all theſe meaſures the

Independents were joined by the *deiſts*, and men of no religion at all. It can therefore only anſwer the purpoſes of *faction* and of *bigotry*, and by no means that of *truth*, to accuſe the *Diſſenters* of putting king Charles to death. Had it been conſidered as an action highly *meritorious*, I doubt not, our pretenſions to it would be far enough from being admitted.

If you read any hiſtory of England whatever, you will find this to be the truth of the caſe, though the very reverſe is more than inſinuated by Mr. Madan, and he may have authorities unknown to all the world beſides. But then he ought not to aſſert what he has done without producing them. Without this he has no right to expect that the *ſettled principles and convictions of* HIS *heart ſhould become thoſe of* YOURS.

Mr. Madan, however, having got his hiſtorical and political principles from ſome ſource or other, is pleaſed to aſſert, p. 8, as a general maxim, that "the preſbyterian principles "are unqueſtionably republican." As he calls it *unqueſtionable*, I imagine he has never queſtioned it himſelf, or made any inquiry into the foundation of it; but as you are not bound to adopt his principles without *queſtioning*, or *examination*, let us ſee how they accord both with the hiſtory of *former times*, and the *preſent ſtate of things*, which Mr. Madan, though he may ſhut his own eyes, cannot conceal from you.

At the time of the *civil wars*, or, as Mr. Madan will ſay, during the *grand rebellion*, the Scots were unqueſtionably Preſbyterians, if ever there were any ſuch people in the world. But though they joined the Engliſh till the king was effectually ſubdued, they remonſtrated againſt putting him to death; and when, after this, England was governed by a republic, the Scotch Preſbyterians (whoſe principles Mr. Madan ſays were *unqueſtionably republican*) were ſo attached to *monarchy*, that they not only received Charles II. and made him *their king*, but in order to aſſiſt him in recovering what they deemed to be his *right*, they marched an army into

England, but were defeated at Worceſter, as every perſon who has read the hiſtory of England well knows. Where, then, is the evidence *from hiſtory* of the principles of Preſbyterians being *unqueſtionably republican?* Mr. Madan, however, aſſerts this to be the *ſettled conviction of his heart*, and therefore he muſt either have read ſome *other* hiſtories of England, or none at all.

Let us now ſee whether it appears from the *preſent ſtate of things*, that the principles of Preſbyterians be, as Mr. Madan aſſerts, *unqueſtionably republican*; and for this purpoſe let us look towards Scotland. And whether Mr. Madan be acquainted with the fact or not, it is well known to others, that *preſbyterianiſm* is as much the eſtabliſhed religion of *that* country, as *epiſcopacy* is of *this*. Now, are the Scots at all ſuppoſed to be inclined to republicaniſm, or have they ever been accuſed, even in the greateſt violence of party, of diſaffection to the preſent government, or of any want of attachment to the preſent royal family. On the contrary, the people moſt diſaffected to government in Scotland, thoſe who joined the pretender in that country were *Epiſcopalians*, and very few of them *Preſbyterians*. If Mr. Madan's maxim be true, that *the principles of Preſbyterians are unqueſtionably republican*, no nation of Preſbyterians would ever have had a *king*, except one that was *forced* upon them. But the Scots always had kings, and as much *of their own choice*, as we in England. In all the civil wars, during the time of Mary Queen of Scots, it does not appear that they ever thought of abandoning monarchical government, and erecting a republic. While Mary was a priſoner in England, they made her ſon their king. That king became afterwards king of England, and they have been the deſcendants of this *preſbyterian king*, who have reigned in this epiſcopalian country, from that time to the preſent day.

Let us now conſider a little the conduct of the Scotch lords and commons ſince the union of the two nations. Are they more hoſtile to monarchy, and the meaſures of government, than the Engliſh members of parliament?

The contrary is generally ſuppoſed. For though many Engliſh lords and commoners oppoſe the meaſures of government, there is hardly an example of any Scotchman, either lord or commoner, ever doing it. And yet Mr. Madan, ignorant, I ſuppoſe of all this, will have it that the *principles of Preſbyterians are unqueſtionably republican.*

Mr. Madan will perhaps ſay that he meant the Preſbyterians *in England*, excluſive of thoſe *in Scotland.* But originally they were the very ſame; and till long after the time of Charles I. in which he charges them with maintaining republican principles, there was no difference whatever between them; and whatever Mr. Madan may think, the Engliſh Preſbyterians at this day are no more attached to a republican government than thoſe of former times, or thoſe in Scotland; and I challenge him to produce any evidence of his confident aſſertion. That ſingle ſpeculative men, Preſbyterians or others, may give the preference to that mode of government *in theory*, is not the queſtion. Mr. Hume evidently had a predilection for it, but was he therefore diſcontented with *this* government, or in the leaſt diſaffected to it? There never was a more obedient ſubject. But the Diſſenters, as a body, have never ſhewn any preference of a republican government; though it is eaſy to aſſert *this*, or any thing elſe, in order to throw an odium on thoſe whom we wiſh to render generally obnoxious.

In fact, Mr. Madan might with as much truth ſay that all Preſbyterians are *Negroes**, and that we paint our faces and hands, in order to conceal it, as maintain that we are *republicans*. Let him, or, ſince *he* will not, do *you*, read my own writings of a political nature, viz. my *Eſſay on the firſt Principles of Government*, or Dr. *Price's Eſſay on Civil Liberty*, which are generally conſidered as the boldeſt, and the moſt exceptionable, of any thing on the ſubject in the Engliſh language; or look into my *Lectures on Hiſtory and General Policy*, in which I particularly conſider all the forms of government, and weigh their advantages and defects, and ſee whether you can diſcover any traces of a preference for republican government. On the contrary, you will there find a decided preference given to our own, and perhaps as good reaſons for this preference as Mr. Madan himſelf is able to give. What then muſt you think of ſuch *calumny* as he, in this random inconſiderate manner, and yet with ſuch uncommon ſolemnity, has thrown out?

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* In the famous conteſted election at Briſtol between the late Lord Nugent (as he afterwards became) and Mr. Beckford, his Lordſhip told me that he gained his point with the populace, by his friends aſſerting that Mr. Beckford (who had an eſtate in Jamaica, and, as I remember, was at that time there) was *a Negro*, and the popular cry on his Lordſhip's ſide was "*no negro, no woollen hair.*" They had even (as I think he added) a painted figure of a negro with ſuch hair carried about the ſtreets. When I aſked him how his friends could aſſert ſuch abſurd falſehoods, he replied that all was fair at an election. Mr. Madan may perhaps think it equally fair in the preſent *conteſt*, to call the Diſſenters republicans, but then he ſhould not have declared that what he aſſerted was from the *ſettled principles and conviction of his heart, as he hoped for mercy from the God of truth.* This was much farther than Lord Nugent went.

The truth is, that we Diſſenters are friends to a *limited monarchy*, in which a king may do much good, and can do but little harm, whereas the clergy in general have always had a leaning to a more *arbitrary form of government*, in which the king ſhall have much to give, and themſelves as much to receive. Hence their deep-rooted attachment to the family of the *Stuarts*, and *ours* to that of *Hanover*. It is well known that the clergy in general were never well affected to what is called *government*, but generally oppoſed the *meaſures of the court*, in the reigns of king William, and thoſe of George I. and George II. while the Diſſenters, out of gratitude for the liberty they enjoyed under them, went perhaps too eagerly with the court, and abetted with too little diſtinction the meaſures of government.

Now, it has unfortunately happened, that *another king is ariſen, who knoweth not Joſeph*, or the obligations that his family are under; a prince who, with the beſt intentions, has the truth hidden from him by churchmen like Mr. Madan; who, without reminding him that the Diſſenters were the ſteadieſt friends of his grandfather, and great grandfather, will perſuade him that they are *his enemies*, and wiſh to overturn his government; and we have not the ſame acceſs to him as they have, and ſo have no opportunity of informing him better. And though he ſhould give us a hearing, his attention has been pre-occupied by ſuch men as Mr. Madan, who have told him that our declarations are not to be truſted. But, my generous countrymen, we think it our happineſs that we have acceſs to *you*, and perhaps finally, through you, to the king himſelf. Before your tribunal I arraign Mr. Madan, of *evil ſpeaking* and *calumny*; and whether it be *intentional*, or not, the *injury* that we receive from it is the ſame. So far he advances his accuſations as *unqueſtionable axioms*. I demand his *proofs*, and do not wiſh for more impartial judges than yourſelves.

Mr. Madan is a young man, and may not have had leiſure to read much Engliſh hiſtory; but he has *heard* and *ſeen* ſomething; and there is a fact ſo recent, as to be within *his* memory, which demonſtrates that the Diſſenters in general were as ready as the members of the eſtabliſhed church to expreſs their approbation of the meaſures of the king, when they imagined (whether juſtly or not) that his prerogative was in danger of being trampled upon. This was the memorable period of the *coalition*, when the Diſſenters were particularly forward in their addreſſes to give their ſanction to the meaſures of a court which had always been unfriendly to them. Would they have done this, if they had been *from principle*, hoſtile to the king, and diſpoſed to take a pleaſure in thwarting him?

But what has been the return for this unqueſtionable proof of our loyalty and zeal? Has it ſecured to us the gratitude of the king, or of the *miniſter*, whoſe cauſe we eſpouſed? We are ſtill, however, ready, as on many former occaſions, to *do good for evil*, and to ſhew our loyalty on any future occaſion, whenever we ſhall think the juſt prerogative of the king, as well as that of the commons, really violated. We conſider not what others ought to do, but only what becomes ourſelves, as good citizens, and friends to the genuine principles of the conſtitution.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

The Inconcluſiveneſs of Mr. Madan's reaſoning on this Subject demonſtrated from a Variety of Conſiderations.

My good Friends and Neighbours,

ADMITTING that Mr. Madan was right in his ſtrange notion, that they were the *Preſbyterians* who put king Charles to death, and that this was in itſelf the moſt criminal of all tranſactions, a crime never to be expiated by all the public calamities that ever befel a nation; can he be juſtified in charging it upon *us*, or in imputing to us the ſame maxims, at the diſtance of more than *four generations*, becauſe we bear the ſame *name?* Do not bodies of men, and whole nations, change their principles, in a courſe of years, even much more than individual perſons; and muſt they who are now innocent ſuffer for the ſins of their remoteſt anceſtors? I ſhall mention a few well known facts, to ſhew how unreaſonable ſuch imputations would be.

The moſt turbulent of all religioniſts at the time of the reformation were the *Anabaptiſts* in Germany. But the *Mennonites*, who are much more properly deſcended from them, than the Preſbyterians of this age from thoſe in the time of Charles I. are the moſt peaceable and inoffenſive of mankind. They are perfect Quakers. The clergy of this country do not, in ſeveral reſpects, hold the ſame principles now that their anceſtors did at the time of the reformation. Their doctrines were then calviniſtic, as the thirty-nine articles, and all the writings of that age, abundantly ſhew. But Arminianiſm came in with archbiſhop Laud, and has been prevalent among the clergy to this day.

Admitting then that, contrary to all evidence of facts, the old Preſbyterians were the perſons principally concerned in the killing, or the murder, of king Charles I. that they were then determined enemies of *all kings*, and that Scotland, occupied chiefly by Preſbyterians, never had a king, it does not follow but that the Preſbyterians of this day, and eſpecially thoſe of England, who have ſeen many good kings (far better, in their opinion at leaſt, than either of the Charles's, or their father James, before them) may not be very well reconciled to kingly government. Allowing all that Mr. Madan has ſaid, notoriouſly falſe as it is, of the old Preſbyterians, it will not follow that we *now*, all of us, carry daggers about us, ready to ſtrike at every king we meet with, or that we are in any ſenſe thoſe dangerous people that Mr. Madan repreſents us. The very terms of *Preſbyterian* and *Independent* have changed their meaning ſince the laſt century; ſo that nothing that may be alleged, though with truth, concerning *them*, can be any juſt ground of accuſation againſt *us*.

If Mr. Madan means that the preſent Preſbyterians, or Independents, are the lineal deſcendants of the old ones, and that the ſame *king killing principles* have been tranſmitted from father to ſon, he will find himſelf ſtill more embarraſſed in his argument. For many perſons, we ſee every day, adopt principles unknown to their anceſtors. My own grandfather was a Churchman, and biſhop Horſley's was a Diſſenter. But do I, on that account, retain any of the principles of Churchmen, or the biſhop thoſe of Diſſenters. I do not believe that any ſuch thing is ſuſpected of either of us. Our worthy rector of St. Martin's is in the ſame predicament. But who entertains the leaſt doubt of the diſintereſted purity of *his* zeal for the church, or thinks that he ever looks back to the principles of his family! King Charles himſelf, like biſhop Horſley's father, was the ſon of a Preſbyterian, who for the ſake of *preferment* conformed to the church of England, which is a coincidence of circumſtances not a little remarkable; and I mention it as what may farther recommend my friend the biſhop to the admirers of the royal and bleſſed martyr. If the ſons of the biſhop, like thoſe of this king, ſhould become Catholics, the parallel will be ſtill more complete.

It is true that more is required of new converts, as a proof of their ſincerity; on the ſame principle that *miracles* require ſtronger evidence than *ordinary facts*; but the king gave theſe abundant proofs, and the biſhop has done the ſame. But though no perſon, I believe, ever queſtioned the ſincerity of king Charles's attachment to the church of England, notwithſtanding his father had been a Preſbyterian, there are ſome ſo unreaſonable as to require more evidence than they have yet ſeen of the *biſhop's* diſintereſted attachment to it. But then there are perſons whom the evidence of *miracles* will not ſatisfy.

To make Mr. Madan's accuſation at all probable, he ſhould point out ſome *connection* between the principles of Diſſenters, and the *republican* or *king killing principles* that he aſcribes to them. Now, though I have frequently turned the ſubject over in my own mind, I cannot fix upon any religious principles that we are either known, or ſuppoſed, to hold, that could lead him to imagine that we have any predilection for a republican government, or entertain a greater *antipathy to kings* than any other claſſes of men. Beſides, our principles are ſo *various*, and ſome of them ſo directly *oppoſite* to thoſe of others, that if ſome were favourable to republican government, others muſt be as favourable to monarchical.

What juſt now perhaps diſtinguiſhes us the moſt is, that ſome of us are *Trinitariuns*, ſome *Arians*, and others *Unitarians*. If Mr. Madan judge by the *majority*, the Trinitarians only muſt be the republicans, and myſelf and friends, who are the minority, muſt be good royaliſts. Or, ſince the great body of the Diſſenters pray *extempore*, and myſelf and a few more uſe our own pre-compoſed forms (and I have even declared a preference for a liturgy) I ought on this account alſo to be excepted from the charge of republicaniſm, which falls on Diſſenters in general. Moſt diſſenting miniſters pray in a plain black coat. If the republicaniſm lie in *that*, I and a few others, who conform ſo far as to wear a *gown and caſſock* in the pulpit, becauſe we find it convenient (eſpecially as a cover for a ruſty coat, or a tattered pair of breeches) have a third ground of exception from a charge that affects the reſt of the Diſſenters.

But, my good friends, to be ſerious, though it is difficult to be ſo in replying to a charge ſo abſurd and ridiculous as that of Mr. Madan; what have any notions about the trinity, what have modes of prayer, or modes of dreſs, or any thing elſe belonging to Diſſenters, to do with ſyſtems of civil government.

Mr. Madan will, no doubt, ſay that our diſloyalty ariſes from ſome principle that is *common* to *all Diſſenters*, though we differ ever ſo much in other reſpects. Now, we agree in nothing but this, that we equally reject all *human authority in matters of religion*. But ſurely that does not imply that we reject all authority in *civil matters*, ſince the things are in themſelves totally different. It is a maxim with us to *render to God the things that are God's*; but then there is another maxim, the counterpart of this, viz. *to render to Cæſar the things that are Cæſar's*. Our Saviour ſaw no inconſiſtency in theſe maxims, neither do we.

If it be a general ſpirit of diſobedience and revolt that neceſſarily ſeizes all Diſſenters, our wives and children, whom we endeavour to make as good Diſſenters as ourſelves, muſt partake of it; and that would ſhew itſelf in the diſorder of private families, in the diſobedience of wives to their huſbands, children to their parents, and ſervants to their maſters. But if Mr. Madan viſited any families of Diſſenters he would find them as well regulated as thoſe of the eſtabliſhed church, where the principles of *paſſive obedience and non-reſiſtance*, no doubt, keep all in perfect ſubjection to one head.

Now, what becomes of an *hypotheſis*, when there are no *facts* to ſupport it? If there be no conſpiracy of Diſſenters againſt the government, no peculiarly refractory diſpoſition of the wives of the Diſſenters againſt their huſbands, or peculiar obſtinacy in Diſſenter's children towards their parents, what evidence is there of the exiſtence of a *turbulent diſpoſition* in Diſſenters at all? Mr. Madan ſhould attend more than he has done to the connexion of *cauſes and effects*, and then he will find himſelf compelled to give up his favourite hypotheſis of the univerſal diſpoſition to *republicaniſm*, and conſequently, as he will ſuppoſe, to *anarchy*, in the principles of the Diſſenters.

It was particularly fortunate for the *Anabaptiſts*, that there were but few of them in England at the time of the civil wars, and that the mention of them does not occur in any civil tranſactions of the times. For as they had been the moſt turbulent of all the ſectaries in Germany, they would certainly have come in for their ſhare of Mr. Madan's cenſure, who would never have been perſuaded but that they had brought their ſeditious principles with them into this country. They now fall under his cenſure (which includes *them* as well as all other Diſſenters) merely becauſe they keep bad company, and go by a bad name. For this reaſon too, the Quakers alſo, and Engliſh catholics, ought to bear their ſhare of this cenſure, and being divided among ſo many, it will hardly be felt by any individual. This I flatter myſelf, will be the caſe when, as claſſes of men equally aggrieved by the laws now exiſting, we ſhall all join in one petition for the repeal of all *penal laws in matters of religion*, and, without ſwords in our hands, *demand*, as our natural and juſt right, the civil privileges of other ſubjects.

If the ſins of remote anceſtors are to be imputed to people now living, and Mr. Madan had been a Welſhman, he might urge his countrymen to make war upon the Engliſh, for driving them out of their lawful poſſeſſions in the time of Hengiſt and Horſa. Do not then follow Mr. Madan in looking for the guilt of the preſent generation in that of another, one hundred and fifty years ago, but conſider our conduct at preſent, and of this, without having recourſe to hiſtory, you can judge yourſelves, and you will not be miſled by preachers, who by taking advantage of your ignorance, may impoſe upon you.

However, after all that has been urged a thouſand times, and from the cleareſt evidence of hiſtory, to exculpate the preſent Diſſenters from the horrid crime of cutting off king Charles's head, this guilt, like *original ſin*, is ſo entailed upon us, that I believe, it muſt deſcend to our lateſt poſterity, and even to the day of judgment. It is even ready to ſeize all the proſelytes we may make, whether they be the poſterity of Charles himſelf, or of his executioners. The clergy have repeated the accuſation ſo often, and in ſuch ſtrong modes of aſſeveration, as the the *ſettled principles and conviction of their hearts*, and they ſeem to believe it as firmly as they do any of the *thirty-nine articles*; ſo that in time it may take its place among them, and make a *fortieth*; though they will then exceed the number of *forty ſtripes ſave one*, which was the limit of caſtigation in the Jewiſh law; and many who muſt ſubſcribe them or ſtarve, I am perſuaded, would rather chuſe that one were taken away, than that any more were added to them. We are the *ſheep*, and our accuſers are the *wolves*, and, ſay what we will, we muſt be guilty. Hoping, however, a more favourable hearing than we have hitherto had, I remain,

My friends and neighbours,
Your very humble Servant,
JOSEPH PRIESTLEY.

FAIR-HILL,
March 4, 1790.

P. S. My next Letter (which will be publiſhed this day ſe'nnight) will relate to the *Teſt and Corporation Acts*, and I ſhall prove to you that neither the *ſtate*, nor the *church*, have any thing more to fear from the repeal of them than from the repeal of the old ſtatutes concerning witches, or from making any new ones concerning canals or turnpike roads, but that both would be gainers by the meaſure.

1903 CAMBRIDGE

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